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SUBJECT: FIRST MUSLIM PARTY IN GERMANY PREPARING TO GO NATIONAL

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11. (U) Summary: Germany's first and only Muslim-oriented political party, Alliance for Peace and Fairness (BFF) -- up until now only active in Bonn -- will run in the North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) state elections this May and ultimately aims to form party organizations in other states and on the national level. The BFF, founded only eight months ago, surprisingly won two seats in the Bonn city council in the August 30, 2009 city elections. The party has a very moderate platform, focusing on strengthening families and promoting women's rights. The BFF expects that it can take advantage of the growing Muslim population in NRW and Germany to become a regular fixture in German politics. End Summary.

BFF Sees Need for a Muslim Party

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12. (SBU) In a meeting with ConOffs January 22, BFF founder and leader Haluk Yildiz confirmed for the first time outside of his party organization that the BFF would take part in the NRW state parliament elections on May 9. Yildiz and other party members founded the BFF after concluding that Bonn and NRW needed a Muslim-led and oriented party in light of the current political party realities. While the two major German parties, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), have Muslim members and candidates, Yildiz considers these members mere political tokens since they do not play a role in the leadership of these parties. The exception is the Greens which have a Turkish Muslim party chairman, Cem Oezdemir, but Yildiz considers this a political anomaly. Yildiz described the right-wing parties in NRW (see reftel) as anti-immigrant and the major left-wing party, Die Linke, as anti-religion, explaining that the only real alternative is a party led by Muslims. The BFF has established organizations in 40 cities in NRW, including the so-called "Capital of Islam in Germany", Cologne.

BFF Has Eye on the Long Term

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13. (SBU) In NRW's August 30, 2009 municipal elections, the BFF won 2.1% of the vote in Bonn and now plays a key role in the city council, supporting the city's CDU-Greens coalition, which relies on the BFF to bolster its narrow majority. Yildiz

confirmed that the BFF does not expect to cross the 5% threshold to win seats in the NRW state parliament in the May 2010 elections, but believes it will win enough votes (at least 1%) to qualify to receive state funds for their party. The BFF is banking on NRW's Muslim population (7% of NRW inhabitants) for support. In addition to NRW, the BFF will also establish party organizations in the coming weeks in Berlin and Bavaria so it can contest state parliament elections coming up in both states in 2011 and 2013, respectively. Yildiz said that ultimately, the BFF will work to establish party organizations in every German state in the coming years in order to take advantage of Germany's growing Muslim population, which he claimed will grow to more than a quarter of the German population in the next 30 years.

#### BFF Has Moderate, Traditional Platform

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14. (SBU) The main goal of the BFF, according to Yildiz, is to afford German Muslims the opportunity to become both politically and socially integrated in German society and to have a voice in German politics. Yildiz noted that the BFF has faced political opposition. For example, he said that the FDP in Bonn attempted to block BFF's participation in the city elections, claiming that it was creating a "parallel society" in Germany. Yildiz dismissed this assertion, saying that the BFF was against "assimilation," which he described as where immigrants lose their identities. He rather favors "integration", where immigrants become part of society without losing their identities. He stressed that the BFF has no interest in creating a parallel society. As Yildiz told Pol/Econ staff before the August 30, 2009 municipal elections, the party wants

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to become the "defender and mouthpiece of the socially disadvantaged" in general, hoping to win support also from outside the Muslim community. The focus in the platform on promoting families and women's rights confirm the moderate appeal of the party.

#### Comment

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15. (SBU) Comment: Yildiz is an open and personable leader, who will likely become more engaged on the state and national levels as the BFF expands. He is politically moderate and has expressed his concern about radicalism, on both the right and the left. Interestingly, a natural coalition partner for the BFF appears to be the CDU, because of that party's traditional family-based values which are held by a majority of Muslims in NRW as well. Yildiz expects that the BFF will eventually cross the 5% threshold -- not in 2010, but in the next NRW state parliament elections, likely to take place in 2015. Even before then, however, the BFF is likely to become a more visible political force in Germany.

16. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Berlin.  
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